



## FAQ for Remote Auditing

Prepared by: RSPO Secretariat, July 2020

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For RSPO Principles and Criteria (P&C) or Group Certification / Independent Smallholder (ISH) Standard		
No.	Question	Answer
1.	During this pandemic, what is the RSPO's decision to ensure that a certified mill can maintain their certification, and have an active PalmTrace license?	RSPO has informed all certification bodies (CBs) to carry out a combination of remote and on-site audits of their certified clients' units. The remote audit will be used as a basis for extending the PalmTrace license for a period of three months or more. A new license can be requested once the on-site audit has been conducted and the audit process has been completed.
2.	How do you ensure RSPO standards are being upheld if there are travel restrictions for auditors and on-site audits cannot be carried out?	<p>To date, all CBs have been informed to carry out a combination of <u>both</u> remote audits and on-site audits (where possible) of their certified clients' units. Furthermore, in an effort to strengthen the credibility of our auditing process during this time, RSPO accredited CBs will be performing remote audits with the participation of one or more 'Audit Facilitators' on-site.</p> <p>An Audit Facilitator can be used whenever the CB's audit team cannot travel to be on-site to perform an assessment, when a site visit and/or interview is required. The audit facilitators will</p>

		support the audit team in verifying and recording appropriate evidence using the technology available, and performing interviews of relevant employees or stakeholders, at the request of the audit team. This process can be used for all types of audits.
	What happens to my PalmTrace license (which is expiring next month) if an on-site audit cannot be carried out due to a lockdown or travel restriction?	Request your CB to extend the existing license for another three months (i.e. the license period will be for 15 months).
4.	What happens to the extended license if the on-site audit still cannot be carried out even after the 3 month extension?	Your CB should conduct a remote audit and request an additional time extension for your PalmTrace license for another three months (i.e. license period will be 18 months).
5.	Can I request for additional certified volumes during the license extension period?	Yes, you may request a volume extension in the extended license period.
6.	When can a new license be requested?	A new license for a mill (P&C) or ISH can only be requested once an on-site audit has been conducted and concluded.
7.	Will the remote audit add an extra cost to the overall audit cost?	No. The remote audit should not increase the overall audit cost as the time taken to conduct the remote audit is based on the quotation provided by your CB.
8.	How long will the remote audit take?	A remote audit shall not be more than 30% of the total quoted mandays. 70% of the time shall be allocated for the on-site audit. For example, if the total mandays quoted is 12 mandays, the remote audit can be done in 3 or 4 mandays, while the on-site audit can be done in 8 or 9 mandays.
9.	What if there is a non-conformity (NC) found during the remote audit?	The NC should be addressed within the required timeframe but the time extension can be submitted once the remote audit is completed.
10.	Why can't a remote audit be carried out to replace the on-site audit?	There are indicators in the P&C and the RSPO ISH Standard that require on-site interviews with workers and community

		members, as well as verification of the site's conditions. The CB needs to conduct a random sample of this during the on-site audit.
11.	Can a CB conduct an Initial Certification audit through a remote audit?	No. An Initial Certification (IC) audit cannot be conducted through a remote audit. The CB needs to apply both a remote and on-site audit for an IC. New license requests can only be carried out once the on-site audit has been carried out and any NCs are closed, before the decision making process is carried out.
12.	Does the position on not allowing new audits against the RSPO ISH standard Eligibility, Milestone A or Milestone B, impact the livelihoods of the ISH?	We fully recognise that this impacts independent smallholder groups that are ready for certification against the RSPO Independent Smallholder (ISH) Standard. In view of this, the RSPO Secretariat has carried out a review for the possibility of implementing remote audits for the Eligibility Phase of the ISH Standard. However, a remote audit for the Eligibility Phase shall only be allowed for if there are restrictions in place for on-site audits in a specified country/region due to COVID-19. More details are as in Contingency RSPO Audits procedure.
13.	Can I transfer my certification to another CB without an on-site audit?	Yes, the CB can do a pre-transfer review prior to the on-site audit. The pre-transfer review is to ensure that the new CB will have control over the PalmTrace license of their client and can plan for a remote audit if a further time extension is required.
14.	Can I change my mill's supply chain model during the lockdown period?	Yes, the CB can conduct a remote audit on the procedure for the new supply chain model.
15.	Is it possible to add new management areas via remote surveillance audit of a certified company?	Yes it is possible to conduct a partial remote audit on new management areas. However, the inclusion of a new management area in the certificate can only be carried out after an on-site audit has been completed. The remote audit will cover the requirements for documented procedures.

<b>16.</b>	Is it possible to request more than a three-month extension for licenses that are about to expire?	Yes, it is possible once the remote audit has been conducted.
<b>17.</b>	Is approval required from the RSPO Secretariat to request a license extension through remote audits?	No, approval from RSPO for the conduct of remote audits is not required. CBs are to plan for a remote audit if a license extension is required.
<b>18.</b>	Do license extensions come together with a volume extension, or is it necessary to request a volume extension independently?	A volume extension can be requested together with the time extension, or independently. It is up to the Unit of Certification to decide.
<b>19.</b>	Does the validity date of the certificate vary when requesting a license extension?	No, as the extension is for an existing license and not a new license.
<b>20.</b>	Can a remote audit be conducted for Milestone A (MS A) or Milestone B (MS B) of the RSPO ISH standard?	No. A combination of remote and on-site audits are required for both MS A and MS B.
<b>21.</b>	Can smallholder groups be certified under the eligibility criteria remotely?	At the moment, the RSPO Secretariat is evaluating the case. For now, a combination of remote and on-site audits are required to assess the compliance of the indicators in the Eligibility phase.
<b>22.</b>	In a country where the lockdown has been lifted, can a remote audit be carried out if the certified unit still imposes a 'no guest' policy or the CB has imposed a travel restriction?	Yes, remote audits can be applied and evidence of such policies needs to be retained.
<b>23.</b>	If restrictions are eased and the CB allows for on-site audits to be carried out, and the company allows the audit team to conduct the initial certification audit, does the CB need to request approval from RSPO?	The decision to conduct on-site audits are between the CB and the company. There is no requirement for approval from RSPO, however, the CB needs to submit the Public Notification of the initial certification audit.

### For RSPO Supply Chain Certification (SCC)

No.	Question	Answer
1.	Is approval required from the RSPO Secretariat to request a license extension through remote audits?	There are no requirements needed to get RSPO's approval for remote audits. The CB is to make the decision on whether a remote or on-site audit needs to be carried out. The decision for a remote audit does need to be justified though.
2.	We have quite a few potential clients in the USA who want to be certified, but due to Covid they cannot go for certification. How should we deal with this?	For SCC, the CBs are allowed to conduct remote audits for Initial Certification (IC), an Annual Surveillance Audit (ASA) or a Recertification(RC) Audit during the pandemic.
3.	What should a CB do when they are unable to schedule a remote audit of their client whose PalmTrace license is expiring tomorrow?	The CB should request a time extension for a maximum period of 3 months prior to the expiry of their client's current license, and carry out a remote audit during this period. A new license shall be requested upon completion of the remote audit.
4.	What is the next step to be taken by the CB once the remote audit has been conducted?	The CB should complete the audit process and submit a new license request in PalmTrace.
5.	Is it possible to request an extension for more than a three-month period for licenses that are about to expire?	For SCC, the remote audits are allowed for IC, ASA or RC. Therefore, no additional time extension is allowed after the first three-month extension has been granted.
6.	An RSPO announcement mentioned that the decision for remote audits will be reviewed by 31 August 2020. Can CBs still conduct remote audits after 31 August 2020?	Yes, a CB can still schedule a remote audit after 31 August 2020, but the reason for this decision must be recorded and maintained for record keeping purposes.
7.	The lockdown may have been eased in Japan but the company still maintains the policy of not allowing any visitors to their office or factory. Can a remote audit be carried out?	Yes, the CB can conduct a remote audit but the reasons for this decision must be recorded and kept for record keeping purposes.

8.	One of our clients had a three-month license extension, which will be valid until 2 August 2020. However, due to a surge in the number of COVID-19 cases, the city where they are located will soon be locked down again. As a remote audit may not be possible, can an additional license extension be granted for the client?	The CB needs to inform the RSPO Secretariat of situations like this prior to requesting an additional time extension after the first three-month PalmTrace extension has been granted. The additional time extension will be allowed on a case-by-case basis. The CB needs to keep records of such cases.
9.	Can a new site be added into the existing certified sites through remote audits?	Yes, a change of scope, either in the form of a reduction or addition of sites is allowed to be made via remote audits.
10.	Since the CB can conduct remote audits, can we request the CB to reduce the number of audit days and the audit cost?	RSPO does not have the mandate to interfere with a decision such as this. It is a business decision between the CB and their client.
11.	We have a client with multi-site certification and according to the audit sampling, we need to audit a site located in a country where the COVID19 pandemic is getting worse. We require RSPO's advice on this matter.	The CB can conduct on-site audits for the sites that are accessible and remote audits for the sites that are not accessible. The reason for a decision like this shall be recorded and maintained for record keeping purposes.